

*Agency
Approaches to
Achieving Our
Goals*



G OAL 7: Expansion of Americans' Right to Know About Their Environment

Easy access to a wealth of information about the state of their local environment will expand citizen involvement and give people tools to protect their families and their communities as they see fit. Increased information exchange between scientists, public health officials, businesses, citizens, and all levels of government will foster greater knowledge about the environment and what can be done to protect it.

Importance of this Goal

Providing all Americans with access to sound environmental information and informing and involving the public in our work are essential parts of a comprehensive approach to protecting the environment. This goal is based on the premise that all U.S. citizens have a "right to know" about the pollutants in their environment--including the condition of the air they breathe and the water they drink, as well as the health effects of the chemicals used in the food and products they buy. Such a premise is especially significant for minority, low-income, and Native American communities that suffer a disproportionate burden of health consequences from poor environmental conditions. As U.S. citizens they need to receive adequate

knowledge of and representation in public policy and environmental decision-making processes.

Access to environmental information also helps make American citizens involved and informed environmental decision makers, and promotes creative and lasting solutions to environmental problems. Citizens who are well-informed can better understand the environmental impacts of their own activities, the relative severity of environmental risks, the opportunities for preventing pollution, and the uncertainties and complex trade-offs that underlie many environmental decisions. This is critical in developing sustainable solutions that all stakeholders--industry, agriculture, government, and the public--will support and carry out.

Objectives

- By 2005, EPA will improve the ability of the American public to participate in the protection of human health and the environment by increasing the quality and quantity of general environmental education, outreach and data availability programs, especially in disproportionately impacted and disadvantaged communities.
- By 2005, EPA will improve the ability of the public to reduce exposure to specific environmental and human health risks by making current, accurate substance-specific information widely and easily accessible.
- By 2005, EPA will meet or exceed the Agency's customer service standards in providing sound environmental information to federal, state, local, and tribal partners to enhance their ability to protect human health and the environment.

What Will Be Accomplished

The principal accomplishment will be to empower state, local, and tribal governments and the American public by providing citizens with information to enable them to make informed decisions regarding environmental issues in their communities. The quality and quantity of general environmental education, outreach and data availability programs will be increased, and EPA will expand the content of our data holdings, improve the quality and usability of the data, and ensure the data are widely available through the Internet and other sources.

Through empowering people with information, the following accomplishments are also expected:

- By 2005, through improved technology, we will increase the accessibility and opportunities for all Americans to learn about environmental issues, including Internet access to comprehensive environmental information on the watershed in which they live including the environmental condition, the stressors, and the environmental health threats.
- By 2005, 95 percent of customers will be satisfied with the timeliness of the Agency's responses to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, executive correspondence, and other information requests.
- By 2005, 90 percent of all customers from small, disadvantaged, and minority-owned businesses will be satisfied with the timeliness and quality of the assistance provided by the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization.
- By 2003, make 100 percent of EPA's non-confidential environmental data available and accessible to the public in a user-friendly manner and provide integrated information to support comprehensive environmental protection approaches such as EPA's Community-Based Environmental Protection Program (CBEP).
- By 2003, provide user-friendly public access to comprehensive environmental performance information, including enhanced access in disproportionately impacted and disadvantaged communities.
- By 2003, EPA will have developed and enhanced an electronic system that will allow the public and EPA stakeholders to access regulatory requirements, EPA policy, guidance, and significant site-specific interpretations via the Internet.
- By 2000, every person served by a community water system will have access to a consumer confidence report that contains information about the system's source water and the level of contaminants in the drinking water and will be able to use this information to secure safe drinking water and make personal decisions about their own health.

Strategies for How It Will Be Accomplished

The Agency will use a variety of strategies focused on the three objectives for this goal. Critical to the success of these strategies will be cooperation and collaboration with all potential partners, including federal, state, tribal, and local governments, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and businesses.

- Increase education, outreach, and data availability programs.
- Support and encourage user-friendly environmental education programs of state and local governments, schools and universities, and community and non-profit organizations.
- Build stronger partnerships and promote increased coordination with other governmental organizations and the private sector.
- Cooperate with other countries to advance common goals for environmental education.
- Provide the public, especially disproportionately impacted and disadvantaged communities, with clear information about regulatory requirements and improve access to environmental data.
- Provide information and tools for communities to make decisions.
- Create a Center for Environmental Information and Statistics (CEIS) to provide citizens with information on drinking water quality, air quality, beach contamination, and shellfish contamination.
- Continue to expand the coverage of pollutants, pollution sources, and data elements in EPA's Toxics Release Inventory, and ensure compliance with reporting requirements.
- Make all non-confidential information and data at EPA available to the public, and expand access to information through libraries, schools, and health departments.
- Expand the Agency's baseline information about the health and environmental effects of products and chemicals, through enhanced data gathering and testing activities.

Agency Approaches to Achieving Our Goals

- Integrate environmental data interpretation and statistics.
- Exchange sound environmental data with all of our partners.
- Engage in more frequent dialogue with state, local and Indian tribal governments, and improve the exchange with them to produce more sound environmental data and tools.
- Consolidate information and reduce duplication of information provided to EPA under a variety of statutory and regulatory authorities.
- Improve electronic access to information by significantly expanding the type and amount of information available on the Internet.
- Continue international collaboration on developing health and environmental effects data.
- Ensure citizen access to the compliance and enforcement records of regulated facilities so that communities can easily monitor whether these companies are in compliance with environmental laws and permit conditions.

Another strategy is contained in the President's Environmental Monitoring for Public Access and Community Tracking (EMPACT) Initiative. This initiative includes other federal agencies and will focus on improving data collection and data quality and on deploying new technologies for real time and automated measurement, monitoring, and information delivery. EMPACT will be targeted to the 75 largest metropolitan areas in the U.S.

Performance Measures

The success of the Right-to-Know programs is ultimately determined by the increased understanding of our environment among all stakeholders, thereby enabling them to make decisions and take actions in helping to solve the nation's environmental problems, particularly at the community level. EPA is playing a major role in educating and providing the data and tools tailored to the needs of various stakeholders. Measures to assess our progress in achieving this goal focus on three areas-- information access, stakeholder awareness, and the improved environmental conditions in targeted areas. We assume there is a cause-effect relationship among the three. Since there are many actions outside EPA's control, we would want to choose the measures aimed at EPA's

actions. For example, we will assess the number of people who access EPA information and whether they find the information useful; the level of awareness of our information among various stakeholder groups, as measured by surveys and other instruments; and the improvement of environmental conditions in targeted areas, including reduced releases of toxic chemicals.



GOAL 8: Sound Science, Improved Understanding of Environmental Risk, and Greater Innovation to Address Environmental Problems

EPA will develop and apply the best available science for addressing current and future environmental hazards, as well as new approaches toward improving environmental protection.

Importance of This Goal

Science enables us to identify the most important sources of risk to human health and the environment, and by so doing, informs our priority-setting, ensures credibility for our policies, and guides our deployment of resources. It gives us the understanding and technologies we need to detect, abate, and avoid environmental problems. This goal recognizes that science provides the crucial underpinning for EPA decisions and challenges us